

REMARKS

In the outstanding Office Action, the Examiner withdrew the finality of the previous rejection; rejected claims 1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 15, and 17 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,654,242 to Komatsu ("Komatsu"); allowed claims 3-5, 9, 12, 14, 18, and 22; and objected to claims 2, 7, 10, 13, 16, and 20.

By this amendment, Applicants have amended claims 2, 7, 10, 13, 16, and 20, placing these claims in independent form. Applicants have canceled claims 1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 15, and 17. Claims 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12-14, 16, 18, 20, and 22 thus remain pending.

Regarding the Examiner's rejection of claims 1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 15, and 17 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b), Applicants disagree with the Examiner's assertions and conclusions as set forth in the outstanding Office Action.¹ In order to expedite prosecution, however, Applicants have canceled claims 1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 15, and 17. Accordingly the rejection of these claims is moot.

Applicants gratefully acknowledge the Examiner's allowance of claims 3-5, 9, 12, 14, 18, and 22, and the indication of allowable subject matter in claims 2, 7, 10, 13, 16, and 20. In order to expedite prosecution, Applicants have rewritten claims 2, 7, 10, 13, 16, and 20 in independent form. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that all pending claims, namely, claims 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12-14, 16, 18, 20, and 22, are allowable over the cited references.

¹ The Office Action contains a number of statements reflecting characterizations of the related art and the claims. Regardless of whether any such statement is identified herein, Applicants decline to automatically subscribe to any statement of characterization in the Office Action.

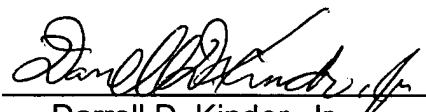
In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and reexamination of this application and the timely allowance of the pending claims.

Please grant any extensions of time required to enter this response and charge any additional required fees to our deposit account 06-0916.

Respectfully submitted,

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